

Hanford performers help stage popular musical

Mike Berriochoa, PNNL

Start with one realtor, combine with a communications specialist, then add in a biologist, a physical chemist and a health physicist. Mix vigorously with plenty of rehearsal and you have a winning recipe for one of the most enduring musical productions ever written — Dale Wasserman's powerful *Man of La Mancha*, to be presented by the Richland Light Opera Company.

Man of La Mancha is a play within a play, set in a prison in the 1600s. Miguel de Cervantes, an aging and utter failure in his varied careers, has been thrown into a dungeon in Seville. There he must await trial by the Spanish Inquisition for an offense against the Church. With his trusted servant he mounts his defense by producing a play about Don Quixote, using prison inmates as actors to tell his story.



Steve Montgomery plays the lead role of Don Quixote in *Man of La Mancha*, directed by Julie Gephart, right, of PNNL.

Directed by Julie Gephart of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, *Man of La Mancha* is a powerful blend of tragedy, romance, comedy and adventure. The part of Cervantes and Don Quixote De La Mancha is played by Steve Montgomery, a local realtor whose heart has long been in community productions.

"Most people associate this part with the great Robert Goulet when he played it on Broadway, and it is somewhat intimidating to be compared to him, but it's a great part with wonderful songs," said Montgomery. And while the music itself can be challenging, Montgomery's character evolves into three separate roles, adding to the degree of difficulty.

For Steve Wiley, who heads PNNL's Biomolecular Systems Initiative, the play is a refreshing break from the stress of his work. In his first community production, Wiley plays the role of Tenorio, a muleteer, which he describes as an old version of today's truck driver.

"The rehearsals are physically strenuous but surprisingly relaxing," Wiley said. "They require me to focus entirely on the production and forget about the job." Wiley is relatively new to the community and appreciates the fact that the production has given him a chance to meet people.

Another PNNL actor is Chuck Peden, who plays Anselmo, a lead muleteer. Peden has a lot of experience on stage as a folk and rock singer, but it's his first appearance in a community production.

"Anselmo is a fun character," Peden said. "He's a con artist who is imprisoned for petty crimes. It's a different style of singing than anything I've done before — plus I have had to learn to act, but I'm excited and ready for opening night."

Acting, however, is only one part of the production. Behind every play is a producer who manages the

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production staff and makes sure the budget is met, schedules are maintained and crises are solved. Gene Carbaugh, who has produced such local efforts as *The King and I*, said *Man of La Mancha* resonates as well today as it did when the story of Don Quixote was written more than 400 years ago. "The message is simple. Regardless of reality, it is your choice how you respond. You can choose to see the best in people or the worst in people."

Gephart said she doesn't know why this play has attracted so many scientists and engineers. In addition to those already mentioned, she said there are many more who work for the various Hanford contractors who are also involved.

The play opened last Friday, April 5, at Chief Joseph Middle School Auditorium in Richland. The last two evening performances will be this Friday and Saturday, April 12 and 13, with 8 p.m. curtain times. A closing matinee will be held Sunday afternoon, April 14, at 2 p.m. Tickets are available at the Book Place in Richland, The Book Worm in Kennewick and Crest Hallmark in Pasco, or by calling 967-5571. ■